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SUBJECT: RUSSIA WELCOMES CONSULTATIONS ON U.S. MISSILE
DEFENSE DEPLOYMENT PLANS BUT REMAINS SKEPTICAL

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel A. Russell. Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

1. (S) Oleg Burmistrov, Chief of the Political-Military Section of the Foreign Ministry's North America Department, told us 13 November that Moscow appreciated the 3 November visit of Undersecretary of Defense Stephen Cambone, who briefed Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov and other senior GOR defense officials on possible U.S. plans to deploy elements of a missile defense system in East Central Europe. According to Burmistrov, the Foreign Ministry welcomed such dialogue as important in mitigating Russia's continued skepticism about the U.S. proposal. He assured us that the Russian Government would consider seriously Cambone's technical arguments, most likely in an interagency context.

2. (S) Burmistrov, however, reiterated Moscow's official position that deployment of U.S. missile defense elements in Poland and the Czech Republic would undermine regional stability, though he acknowledged that the system would not necessarily be perceived as a direct threat against Russia. But GOR authorities remained concerned about Russia's ability to detect missile interceptors as non-offensive weapons and were still uncertain how the U.S. system would mesh with NATO's theater missile defense program. Burmistrov said Moscow had raised the latter issue with NATO and had suggested the establishment of a NATO-Russia Council experts working group to discuss all types of threats against the U.S., Europe, and Russia. With a common view of the threat, Moscow would be in a better position to accept proposed countermeasures. Allied reaction to the Russian proposal had not been completely satisfactory, he added. Asked about recent public statements from senior GOR officials that Russia would be forced to react to deployment of a U.S. system, Burmistrov said he had no idea what measures were contemplated.

3. (S) Defense Ministry officials told DAO officers that they were satisfied with the "physics" of the system as not presenting a threat to Russia but insisted there was still much political work to be done before such a system could realistically be deployed.

4. (S) COMMENT: While the MFA is not a player in decision-making on reactions to U.S. missile defense, Burmistrov's comments are illustrative of the continued GOR resistance. Presidential hopeful Sergey Ivanov, not surprisingly, has continued his public criticism of the missile defense system, reiterating that Russia would find "asymmetrical, but no less effective" ways to ensure its security. Continuing dialogue will be crucial in overcoming skepticism that the proposed system is not a threat to Russia.
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